

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-08 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 OMB-01 EB-08 /085 W
-----141417Z 033621 /46

R 141144Z FEB 77
FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5774
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY RABAT
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY AMMAN
USCINCEUR
CINCUSNAVEUR
USDOCOSOUTH
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY LISBON 090
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY VALLETTA

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USCINCEUR FOR POLAD

CINCUSNAVEUR FOR POLAD

USDOCOSOUTH PLEASE PASS CINCSOUTH FOR POLAD

E.09 11652: XGDS-2 (DATE IMPOSSIBLE TO DETERMINE)

TAGS: PFOR TS

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SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER ON U.S.-TUNISIAN BILATERAL
RELATIONS

1. AS HE PROMISED AT OUR LAST MEETING, FOREIGN MINISTER
HABIB CHATTY TOOK ON HOUR WITH ME FEBRUARY 12 TO REVIEW
CURRENT STATUS OF US-TUNISIAN BILATERAL RELATIONS AND
TO SET, OUT, AS CURRENT CHAIRMAN OF ARAB LEAGUE COUNCIL OF

MINISTERS, HIS VIEWS ON MOVING TOWARD RESOLUTION OF MIDDLE EAST PROBLEMS. THIS WAS UNDERTAKEN ON EVE OF SECRETARY'S MIDDLE EAST TRIP TO ENABLE ME TO REFLECT HIS THINKING AT FORTHCOMING MAGHREB COM MEETING WITH SECRETARY VANCE. (IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING TELEGRAM COVERS CHATTY'S VIEWS ON MIDDLE EAST.)

2. EARLY HIGH-LEVEL CONTACT: CHATTY BEGAN BY MAKING POINT

BEING HAMMERED HOME IN WASHINGTON BY AMBASSADOR HEDDA (STATE 032245) THAT GOTMOST ANXIOUS TO ESTABLISH EARLY "MINISTERIAL LEVEL" CONTACT WITH LEADERSHIP OF CARTER ADMINISTRATION. TUNISIA FRANKLY, HE SAID, WANTS TO BE ASSURED THAT CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOT HAS ENJOYED WITH US WILL BE CONTINUED INFUTURE AND THAT TUNISIA'S NEEDS WILL RECEIVE PRIORITY CONSIDERATION IN WASHINGTON. GOT REALIZES PRESSURES ON NEW ADMINISTRATION SO INITIAL CONTACTS NEED NOT BE FORMAL OR BURDENSOME.

3. JOINT COMMISSION: GOT, FONMIN SAID, ATTACHES HIGHEST IMPORTANCE TO PERPETUATION OF JOINT COMMISSION ARRANGVEMENT WITH U.S. TO DATE IT HAS NOT PROVEN AS SUCCESSFUL AS GOT HAD HOPED, PERHAPS BECAUSE HAPPENSTANCE OF OCTOBER MEETINGS DOES NOT FIT WELL INTO EITHER GOVERNMENT'S BUDGET CYCLE. GOTLWILL WISH TO PURSUE IDEA OF EARLY MEETING OF JOINT COMMISSION AND WILL HAVE MORE TO SAY TO US ON THIS.

4. BASIC BILATERAL OBJECTIVES: CHATTY SAID HE HAD BEEN COMPLETELY FRANK IN HIS OCTOBER 22 "TETE-A-TETE" WITH
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SECRETARY KISSINGER IN STRESSING WHY TUNISIA'S GEOPOLITICAL AND STRATIGIC POSITIONS MAKE ITS FRIENDSHIP OF SPECIAL VALUE TO U.S. HE AND PRIME MINISTER HOPE FOR A CHANCE TO STRESS SAME CONSIDERATION WITH PRESIDENT CARTER AND SECRETARY VANCE. TUNISIA IS "MEMBER OF TWO IVRLDS OF CRITICAL CURRENT IMPORTANCE TO U.S.".

5. ARAB WORLD AND MEDITERRANEAN WORLD. IN ITS POLICIES SINCE INDEPENDENCE TUNISIA IS ONE OF THE VERY FEW COUNTRIES, IF NOT THE ONLY COUNTRY, IN THOSE TWO "WORLDS" WHICH HAS FAITHFULLY AND CONSISTENTLY FOLLOWED POLICIES OF BALAPCE AND MODERATION, POLICIES ALMOST INVARIABLY ACCEPTABLE TO THE U.S. THESE POLICIES HAVE BEEN FOLLOWED OFTEN TO TUNISIA'S DISADVANTAGE IN HER RELATIONS WITH OTHERMEMBR STATES IN THOSE TWO WORLDS BUT NEVER TO THE DISADVANTAGE OF THE U.S. U.S. HAS RESPONDED WITH GENEROSITY. TUNISIA IS MOST GRATEFUL, PARTICULARLY FOR ASSISTANCE GIVEN IN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND HOPES A HIGH LEVEL OF AMERICAN AID INPUT WILL BE CONTINUED DURING CRITICAL FIVE-YEAR PLAN JUST

BEING LAUNCHED.

6. MILITARY COOPRATION: CHATTY CONTINUED, IF ONE LOOKS OVER U.S.' BEST FRIENDS IN ARAB WORLD ONE SEES MOROCCO WITH A "NOT NEGLIGIBLE" MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT, THANKS CHIEFLY TO AMERICAN AID. U.S. HAS RECENTLY AGREED TO RESUME HELPING SUDAN,"PERHAPS MORE VULNERABLE TODAY THAN TUNISIA", WITH MILITARY ASSISTANCE. EGYPT CAN COUNT ON INCREASING LEVELS OF U.S. MILITARY AID. SAUDI ARABIA AND "EVEN LITTLE KUWAIT" ARE BEING GENEROUSLY HELPED. BUT MILITARILY TUNISIA IS CLEARLY SEEN AS WEAKEST OF AMERICA'S ARAB FRIENDS. GOT HAS NO DESIRE TO BECOME A MILITARY POWER.

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USCINCEUR FOR POLAD

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ON CONTRARY, IT HAS NO DESIGNS ON ANY NEIGHBOR. IT HAS BY
POLICY OVER THE YEARS SACRIFICED ITS MILITARY DEVELOPMENT
TO ADVANCING ITS SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC OBJECTIVES. NOW,
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HOWEVER, IT FINDS ITSELF WITH THE DANGEROUS AND UNPREDICTABLE
QADHAFI RATTLING SABRES ON ITS DOORSTEP, BUILDING UP BASES AT EL
WOTIA AND GHADAMES, BOTH JUST KILOMETERS BEYOND TUNISIAN
FRONTIER. "AGAINST WHOM"TP ASKED CHATTY. GOT NOW FINDS
ITSELF OBLIGED TO BEGIN A FIVE-YEAR PROGRAM OF MODERNIZATION
OF ITS NEGLECTED DEFENSE FORCES. THIS WILL COST DOLS 500
MILLION IN FUNDS GOT WOULD FAR RATHER DEVOTE TO INTERNAL
DEVELOPMENT, BUT IT IS RELYING HEAVILY ON PROMISED U.S.
FMS CREDITS OVER NEXT FIVE YEARS. CHATTY SAID THAT, AS I
WOULD APPRECIATE, GOT'S AIM IS CREATION OF A CAPABILITY OF
"DISSUASION AND RESISTANCE", TPHKI D# TUNISIA TO HOLD OUT

AGAINST AN AGGRESSOR UNTIL HELP FROM FRIENDS ARRIVES OR UNTIL
"INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTION, CAN BE EFFECTED. TODAY SHE WOULD
BE UNABLE TO DO SO.

7. CONTINENTAL SHELF: IN CONTEXT OF "BILATERAL RELATIONS"
CHATTY SOMEWHAT SURPRISINGLY INCLUDED THE DISPUTED OFFSHORE
BOUNDARY BETWEEN TUNISIA AND LIBYA, SUBJECT OF CONSIDERABLE
PREVIOUS TRAFFIC BETWEEN EMBASSY AND DEPARTMENT. HE PUT
IT WITHIN FRAMEWORK OF "SECURITY". HE SAID HE HOPES U.S.
WILL UNDERSTAND ITS SECURITY IMPORTANCE (AS IT WOULD ABOUT
DOUBLE TUNISIA'S OIL RESERVES SHOULD GOT'S CLAIM BE SUCCESSFUL).
IN ALL ITS RELATIONS THESE DAYS WITH LIBYA, FONMIN SAID, GOT
CONSISTENTLY MAKES KNOWN IMPORTANCE IT ATTACHES TO REACHING
AN EARLY DECISION ON "CONTINENTAL SHELF" PROBLEM. IN CONTEXT
OF FIVE-YEAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN ALONE IT IS CRITICALLY
IMPORTANT FOR GOT, HE STRESSED. MOREOVER, HE HOPED, WHEN
TIME IS RIPE FOR GOT TO PROCEED WITH DRILLING OPERATIONS
WITHIN DISPUTED ZONE USG WILL NOT STAND IN THE WAY OF HAVING
BUTTES INTERNATIONAL ABIDE BY ITS CONTRACT TO CARRY OUT
DRILLING. TUNISIA BELIEVES ITS CLAIMS TO THE RICH OIL
DEPOSITS ARE FULLY JUSTIFIED AND GOT WILL "NEVER ABANDON ITS
RIGHTS, NEVER". THE MESSAGE WAS CLEAR THAT OUR SUPPORT IS
EXPECTED.

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8. TUNISIA AS MEDITERRANEAN STATE: TUNISIA AS WELL AS U.S. IS PREOCCUPIED WITH CURRENT THRUST FOR POWER BY "EURO-COMMUNITIS", SAID FONMIN, CITING ITALY, FRANCE, SPAIN AND PORTUGAL AS POTENTIAL DANGER SPOTS. U.S. HAS COME IMPRESSIVELY TO AID OF SPAIN AND PORTUGAL, TWO COUNTRIES OF WHOM U.S. HAD HAD LITTLE REASON TO BE PROUD AT LEAST UNTIL LATELY. "ALL WE ARE ASKING", SAID CHATTY, "IS THAT YOU TREAT US AT LEAST AS WELL AS YOU TREAT SPAIN AND PORTUGAL". TUNISIA'S "GEOPOLITICAL AND STRATEGIC POSITION", HE FELT, MAKES TUNISIA OF SPECIAL IMPORTANCE TO THE UNITED STATES HE URGED ME TO CARRY TO SECRETARY VANCE THE THOUGHT THAT THE U.S. HAS HAD AND HAS NOT BETTER FRIEND IN THE ARAB WORLD, THE MAGHREB WORLD, THE MEDITERRANEAN WORLD, THAN TUNISIA. I PROMISED TO DO SO AND THANKED HIM FOR HIS PRECIS OF HIS GOVERNMENT'S VIEW OF THE TUNISIAN-AMERICAN RELATIONSHIP.

9. COMMENT: CHATTY'S PRESENTATION WAS DELIVERED IN HIS PLEASANT, LOW-KEY MANNER WITHOUT A NOTE. HIS AMERICAN DESK OFFICER WAS THE ONLY OTHER ONE PRESENT. HE HAD HAD OVER TEN DAYS TO PREPARE HIMSELF FOR IT. WITOUT A DOUBT HE HAD DISCUSSED HIS MESSAGE WITH PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA AND PROBABLY WITH PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA, WHOM HE SAW TWO OR THREE TIMES IN THE PAST WEEK. IT REPRESENTS, IN ESSENCE, TUNISIA TALKING TO US FROM THE HEART. HIS OVERVIEW COULD, OF COURSE, BE CHARACTERIZED BY SKEPTICS AS SELF-SERVING; BUT WHAT EXPERIENCED FOREIGN MINISTER FROM WHAT SMALL STATE WOULD NOT TRY TO UTILIZE A PREVIOUS HALF HOUR TO HIS COUNTRY'S ADVANTAGE? AND WHAT FOREIGN MINISTER WOULD DO IT SO NICELY? THE THING ABOUT THE TUNISIANS IS THAT THE THEMES THEY PLAY ON WHEN RELATING TO US HAVE BEEN CONSISTENT LO* THESE TWENTY-ONE YEARS. LIKE THE CAPTIVATING MAALOUF AND ANDALOUZ MUSIC THAT PERMEATES THEIR CAFES, RADIO AND TV, ITS THEME IS BASICALLY "UNREQUITED LOVE".
MULCAHY

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